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Draft country programme document**

Bulgaria

Summary

The Executive Director presents the draft country programme document for Bulgaria for discussion and comments. The Executive Board is requested to approve the aggregate indicative budget of $2,464,000 from regular resources, subject to the availability of funds, and $2,500,000 in other resources, subject to the availability of specific-purpose contributions, for the period 2006 to 2009.

* E/ICEF/2005/7.
** In accordance with Executive Board decision 2002/4 (E/ICEF/2002/8), the present document will be revised and posted on the UNICEF website in October 2005, together with the summary results matrix. It will then be approved by the Executive Board at its first regular session of 2006.

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Basic data† *(2003 unless otherwise stated)*	
Child population (millions, under 18 years)	1.4
U5MR (per 1,000 live births)	15
Underweight (%, moderate and severe)	..
Maternal mortality ratio (per 100,000 live births, 1992/1994)	15
Primary school enrolment (% net, male/female, 2000/2001)	94/92
Primary schoolchildren reaching grade 5 (%, 1999/2000)	95
Use of improved drinking water sources (%, 2002)	100
Adult HIV prevalence rate (%, end 2003)	<0.1
Child work (%, children 5-14 years old)	..
GNI per capita (US$)	2 130
One-year-olds immunized against DPT3 (%)	96
One-year-olds immunized against measles (%)	96

† More comprehensive country data on children and women are available at www.unicef.org.

The situation of children and women

1. In the last decade, Bulgaria has made a number of far-reaching political and economic reforms that are transforming it into a democratic and open-market country and positioning it for membership in the European Union (EU) in 2007. Its 7.5 million people are primarily ethnic Bulgarians (84 per cent), ethnic Turks (9 per cent) and ethnic Roma (5 per cent), according to the 2001 Census.

2. The European Commission's (EC) 2004 report on Bulgaria's progress towards accession underlines the gains achieved by the country in consolidating and deepening the stability of its institutions, guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect and protection of minorities. The report also identified a number of gaps and recommended more efficient interdepartmental coordination at national level, including in the areas of human rights, protection of minorities and a better legal framework for local administration. The report also emphasized the need to establish an independent body to implement comprehensive legislation on anti-discrimination, and to reinforce child welfare structures and their coordination with relevant ministries. In addition, sustained efforts are needed to tackle the problems of minorities and set up efficient and integrated monitoring and evaluation systems.

3. The Committee on the Rights of the Child provided similar directions in its observations on Bulgaria's initial report in 1997. It called for giving priority to the development of a system of data collection and identification of appropriate disaggregated indicators in order to address all areas of the Convention of the Rights of the Child and all groups of children. It recommended the creation of an independent mechanism to monitor child rights and the allocation of sufficient budgetary resources for social services for improved quality and accessibility.

4. The economy has grown in recent years at approximately 4 per cent per year, but there are significant disparities between regions. Expenditures on health and education have increased but are not yet on par with EU averages. Bulgaria's 2003 report on the Millennium Development Goals stated that the country's average

income is approximately 10 times lower than the EU average, and twice as low as that of the countries that recently joined the EU. Real wages declined by 40 per cent from 1989 to 2002, and 13 per cent of the population live below the relative poverty threshold. During the same period, Bulgaria's child population declined by 36 per cent mainly because of decreases in fertility, birth rates and emigration. Disparities also persist along ethnic lines. According to the World Bank, a person of ethnic Turk or ethnic Roma origin in Bulgaria is respectively four times or ten times more likely to be poor than an ethnic Bulgarian.

5. Although there have been some improvements in the overall situation of families, many are still confronting hardship. The general divorce rate has increased by 75 per cent since 1989. Both single-parent families and families with many children have a higher risk of being poor. Children born to single mothers account for 43 per cent of total live births, a four-fold increase during the same period. There are about 2,900 young children aged 0-4 years living in infant homes, one of the highest numbers in the region.

6. Bulgaria has achieved universal salt iodization (USI). Child survival indicators have remained mostly stagnant over the last 14 years, with child and maternal mortality rates that are two and four times higher respectively than the EU averages. This reflects the isolation of entire groups from social and health care systems, compounded by families' poor awareness of reproductive health and proper childcare practices, which in turn limit demands for better health education and services at community level. There is a lack of data on nutrition for pregnant and lactating mothers, and on breastfeeding and young child feeding, although there is evidence that nutrition practices among some groups are poor.

7. Over 90 per cent of children complete nine years of education, but schools are ill adapted to preparing young people for employment in the modern-day market. Rural children have an average of three years less education than urban children. Children of 42 per cent of Roma families do not complete primary education, and an estimated 13 per cent of Roma adults are illiterate, an increase of 50 per cent between 1992 and 2001. The laws on compulsory education until age 16 and inclusive education for disabled children are not fully enforced. Increasing drop outs from the national education system exposes many children to exploitation, violence and abuse at an early age.

8. From 1990 to 2002, the number of children in public institutional care, which includes infant homes, child homes, orphanages, boarding schools and institutions for physically and mentally disabled children and correctional schools, decreased from 70,600 to 30,250. This was mainly due to a reduction in number of boarding schools and institutions for physically and mentally disabled children and a change in the reporting system.

9. From 1989 to 2002, the registered juvenile crime rate increased three and one half times and by 2002, affected over 4 per cent of children aged 14-17 years, the highest rate in the region. This increase relates mostly to a rise in thefts and physical violence by children, an indication of the difficult process of transition for the young generation. Trafficking of children and women is a concern. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have reported that between 2000 and 2003, at least 350 individuals, mostly women, were trafficked, and almost one half of them were minors.

10. There are 508 HIV-positive individuals officially registered in Bulgaria — 69 per cent of them men and 31 per cent women. In 2004, 43 new infections were reported, 13 of which are in the 18-25 age group. Ninety percent of the HIV-positive individuals were infected through sexual contact. Between 1986 and 2004, 35 HIV-positive pregnant women were registered. Substance abuse also remains a problem. There are about 25,000 young people using drugs, while approximately 16,000 young people aged 15-25 years are regularly injecting heroin, according to data from the last census and the National Drugs Centre.

11. The country is striving to address problems related to child welfare and protection. Recent economic growth and the process of accession to the EU are windows of opportunity for increasing attention to and resources for children and putting in place sustainable systems and processes to protect their rights.

Key results and lessons learned from previous cooperation, 2003-2005

Key results achieved

12. The aims of the previous programme included a focus on young child nutrition, child protection and young people's health and development.

13. The achievement of USI and the elimination of iodine deficiency were confirmed by the 2003 UNICEF-supported national household utilization survey on the use of iodized salt and urinary analysis among pregnant women and children. Verification is subject to international assessment on iodine nutrition, planned in 2005. This will be the culmination of efforts by the Government and UNICEF to ensure sound iodine nutrition for children and pregnant women through national legislation, enhanced capacity for iodization of locally produced salt, comprehensive monitoring systems and ongoing information for the public and medical professionals. These efforts were supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

14. The process of preparing the National Plan of Action on the Prevention of Commercial Sexual Exploitation (2003-2006) increased the awareness of various government departments on this issue and provided a comprehensive framework for prevention and addressing the needs of victims and their families. In the area of de-institutionalization of children, national testing of the World Bank/UNICEF tool kit on standards of care of children in institutions resulted in new standards for improvement in the quality of services for children living in residential care. Models for foster care are being developed for national replication. In partnership with the Minister of Justice, a multisectoral review of the juvenile justice system was carried out and a national strategy and plan of action on juvenile justice were prepared and adopted.

15. As part of a national system for ongoing monitoring of child rights, comprehensive baseline data have been compiled on the status of implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Detailed analysis is being conducted by the newly established National Working Group under the State Agency for Child Protection (SACP), which comprises both government and civil society representatives and UNICEF.

16. Selected components of the national strategy for the prevention of HIV were supported in partnership with the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Health Organization (WHO), the Social Development Unit under the Office of the United Nations Resident Coordinator and the Canadian International Development Agency. This included enhancing the technical capacities of the members of the National HIV/AIDS Committee and other professionals; development of a coalition of NGOs that worked collectively in three national HIV campaigns to promote greater awareness of HIV/AIDS among young people and the public; and expanded national capacities in voluntary counselling and testing for HIV. From 2004, with funding from Development Cooperation Ireland, the programme helped to enhance the capacities of health professionals for planning "youth-friendly" health services.

Lessons learned

17. Identifying good practices and innovative interventions that have the potential to be replicated and sustained requires strengthened systems for coordination and information exchange between national and local governments, and needs to be closely linked to resource mobilization to effectively reach the most affected children and their families on a priority basis.

18. The working groups which revised the implementation the Convention on the Rights of the Child concluded that while reforms are underway as part of Bulgaria's accession to the EU, the implementation of measures on child health, education and protection, especially among minority groups, has been slower than expected. More time and effort are needed to mobilize support for changing systems.

19. The challenges that need to be addressed in the context of ongoing social sector reforms include the strengthening of national and local-level monitoring of the situation of children, based on a comprehensive set of basic social sector /child rights indicators and timely use of the data for local and national resource allocation and planning. Current monitoring systems do not fully capture the situation of children and young people in minority groups.

20. The participation of civil society, particularly children and young people, in decision-making and implementation of programmes is still limited at both national and local levels. There is a need not only to equip young people with appropriate attitudes and skills but also for adults, parents and teachers to adopt new ways of interaction. Sustainable mechanisms to obtain the views of young people in local and national planning need to be developed through a consultative process with youth organizations.

The country programme, 2006-2009

Summary budget table

	(In thousands of United States dollars)		
Programmes	*Regular resources*	*Other resources*	*Total*
Social policy and advocacy	600	200	800
Child rights monitoring	750	700	1 450
Children and young people's development and protection	614	1 000	1 614
Cross-sectoral costs	500	600	1 100
Total	**2 464**	**2 500**	**4 964**

Preparation process

21. Bulgaria does not have a United Nations Development Assistance Framework. The proposed programme of cooperation has been developed in close collaboration with the Government and the United Nations agencies. The SACP and UNICEF supported two exercises assessing national compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, with the participation of government ministries, civil society, the private sector, mass media and children. The implementation checklists for the Convention, a human rights-based approach to programming and results-based management principles were all applied during the workshops for better identification of gaps and tangible results for children. In addition, consultations were held with United Nations agencies, the EC, the World Bank, USAID, other major donors and NGOs.

Goals, key results and strategies

22. The overall goal of the country programme is to support the Government's vision for Bulgarian children for 2010, that children grow-up healthy, educated, informed, socially active and responsible in a safe, secure, enabling and supportive family and social environment, and that they feel secure in their development as young people. This goal will contribute to realization of child rights and sustainable achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, with a special focus on marginalized groups.

23. Bulgaria is expected to join the EU in less than two years time and the EC is bringing substantial financial resources to facilitate the process of integration before and after accession, with the full commitment of the Government. The new country programme will build on the historical opportunity and momentum of EU integration to ensure that the best interests of children remain central and that necessary resources are made available to achieve long-lasting results for children.

24. The programme will seek to achieve the following key results: (a) improved policies and programmes that are child-focused both at national and regional levels; (b) local authorities will be able to plan social service delivery for children at district and municipal levels, based on human rights-based approaches and results-

based management; (c) civil society organizations will participate in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating child protection programmes; and (d) children from the most vulnerable families, including Roma: (i) will receive better parental care; (ii) have adequate access to protection services; (iii) have the skills and practices to prevent risky behaviours; and (iv) will remain in school.

25. A four-pronged strategy will be applied. At national level, existing national institutions responsible for intersectoral coordination will be strengthened in order that children's rights are at the forefront of the political agenda and a more integrated national policy framework for children comes into place. At subnational level, capacity development of district and municipal governments will support the adoption of new approaches to promote child protection and development programmes. Principles of human rights-based approaches to programming and results-based management will be the cornerstone of capacity-building of local social protection managers. Thirdly, models of best practices in child protection, young people's development and participation, and early childhood development (ECD) will be identified and disseminated with a view to national scaling-up. A special emphasis on the most vulnerable will include Roma and other minority groups. Finally, mechanisms will be developed for young people's participation in decisions affecting their lives and monitoring implementation of child rights in their communities.

Relationship to national priorities

26. The proposed programme takes into account and supports the goals and strategies detailed in the following documents: the National Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion; the National Strategy for Child Protection; the National Plan for Decreasing the Number of Children in Specialized Institutions; the National Action Plan Roma Inclusion Decade 2005-2015; the National Action Plan Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children; the National Anti-Drug Strategy; the National Action Plan for Prevention and Control of HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections; the EU criteria for membership (*acquis communautaires*); and the Joint Inclusion Memorandum signed between the Government and the EU.

27. The proposed programme will be implemented in close collaboration with United Nations agencies in accordance with the priorities listed in Bulgaria's report on the Millennium Development Goals. The UNICEF programme has also identified complementarities with the UNDP programme for strengthening good governance for local and regional development and support to social inclusion.

Relationship to international priorities

28. The country programme has been guided by the: (a) the Millennium Development Goals on poverty and malnutrition, education, empowerment of women, child mortality and maternal health, HIV/AIDS and partnership for development; (b) the goals of *A World Fit for Children* for promoting healthy living, providing quality education, combating HIV/AIDS and protecting children against abuse, exploitation and violence; (c) the UNICEF medium-term strategic plan; (d) the relevant sections of the 2004 EC report on Bulgaria; and (e) the concluding observations and recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Programme components

Social policy and advocacy

29. A number of good initiatives and programmes on children and women exist. However, the efficiency and effectiveness of these programmes could be enhanced by coordinated planning among different departments and more effective use and targeting of limited resources.

30. This programme component will contribute to ongoing efforts by the Government to improve the efficiency and utilization of budget allocations for children. The programme will support national authorities in conducting a comprehensive review of public expenditures on health, education, social protection and welfare. Existing policies and legislation that guide the development of national and local budgets will be assessed, as will the composition of public expenditures in the social sector at national and local levels. Improved data collection and information systems (such as *DevInfo*) will provide disaggregated data on the situation of most vulnerable groups of children and families in various parts of the country. This will help to better target those children and families that are presently not reached by basic services.

31. Support will be provided to develop indicators of minimum basic needs for each family to ensure an acceptable standard by which to identify families and children in greatest need. These indicators will be used to guide the development of local plans and allocation of resources.

32. The National Council for Children (NCC) and the Association of Mayors will develop a code and standards to delineate the role, functions and responsibilities of local governments on child protection, in collaboration with UNDP and the EC. The analysis of public expenditures for children will be carried out in partnership with the World Bank and UNDP.

Child rights monitoring

33. The SACP and the NCC were created to ensure intersectoral coordination in implementing programmes for fulfilment of children's rights and well-being. The current devolution of power and budget to local governments for the delivery of basic services has created organizational uncertainties that need to be addressed, along with the need for more active participation by civil society and communities.

34. This programme component will strengthen the NCC, which is comprised of deputy ministers from all concerned ministries, representatives of NGOs and children's and international organizations, in exercising its role in advancing the well-being of children. The NCC Secretariat will be able to develop intersectoral plans of action, monitor their implementation and scale up successful models. The capacity of the Ombudsman's Office will be also reinforced to review children's issues on a more systematic basis and provide clear and impartial guidance to all concerned parties. Public awareness of child rights will be also supported.

35. At subnational level, the programme will contribute to enhancing the capacities of local governments in strengthening planning of child protection, improving data collection systems and supporting the participation of civil society.

Local government officials in targeted regions will be able to develop local integrated plans focused on children. These models will be documented to support their replication in other regions. Knowledge and skills of the most vulnerable families on ECD and child protection will be enhanced. Collaboration will be developed with UNDP.

Children and young people's development and protection

36. A number of factors contribute to the vulnerability of children and young people. These include social exclusion, economic hardship, deteriorating quality of schools, low motivation of teachers and the exclusion of children with disabilities from regular schools.

37. This programme component will focus three interrelated interventions. The first will support the Government in carrying out an assessment of the condition of primary schools. The objective is to identify the priority issues that have to be addressed in order to make learning in schools more efficient and relevant, thus reducing the dropout rate.

38. The second intervention will contribute to strengthening the life-skills component within the existing school curricula and through non-formal education. The themes will be broadened to include subjects such as children's rights, protection against HIV/AIDS and substance abuse, combating prejudice and discrimination, conflict resolution and consensus-building. Interactive learning methods that encourage discussion, negotiation and problem solving will be supported.

39. Lastly, mechanisms will be developed for the participation of young people, especially from vulnerable communities, in planning of services and monitoring implementation of child rights in their communities. Strong alliances with UNAIDS, UNDP and UNFPA as well as youth NGOs will be further developed in order to reach the maximum coverage of programmes.

40. **Cross-sectoral costs** will cover operating costs, including utilities and rent, communication and related staff costs.

Major partnerships

41. The major government partners are the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Finance, Interior, Justice, Education, Health, and Labour and Social Policy; the NCC and its Secretariat; the Ombudsman's Office; the SACP; and the Association of Municipalities. Enhanced partnerships will be developed with civil society, international and national NGOs and children's representatives.

42. UNICEF will pursue opportunities to strengthen joint programming with United Nations partners, especially UNAIDS, UNDP, UNFPA and WHO in the area of prevention of HIV/AIDS and improving decentralized planning and local management of social services.

43. Close collaboration will be pursued with the EC on the coordination and monitoring of compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The EC

and the World Bank will be consulted for the comprehensive review of public expenditures for the social sector.

Monitoring, evaluation and programme management

44. UNICEF will cooperate with partner agencies in establishing information systems such as *DevInfo* for monitoring progress on child rights and quality of life indicators.

45. The programme will be monitored through annual reviews of progress against an annual plan and a midterm review to be held in 2008, using results-based methodologies. This will be based on the annual and the four-year integrated monitoring and evaluation plan. The programme will be evaluated according to the expected outcomes as described in the country programme's results matrix.

46. A number of key indicators will be developed to jointly monitor with Government counterparts the programme's progress. The following is a list of suggested indicators: (a) rates of public expenditure on social protection, health and education focused on children; (b) the availability of mechanisms at national and local levels for NGO participation (including youth NGOs) in planning, implementing and evaluating programmes; (c) the number of children referred by social protection services to alternatives to institutionalization; (d) the level of knowledge and skills of young people on preventing risky behaviours; (e) the education dropout rate; and (f) the number of children involved in school governance mechanisms.

47. The SACP and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will have overall responsibility for coordination of the country programme.